

News from SALEM COUNTY

Office of Public Information

Mr. Robin B. Weinstein, Public Information Officer Office Phone: (856) 935-7510 ext. 8202

After Hours: (609) 504-4275

FREEHOLDERS OPPOSE CORZINE'S PROPOSAL TO CUT STATE AID

(SALEM, NJ)—Freeholder Director Lee Ware, Deputy Director David Lindenmuth, and Freeholder Bruce Bobbitt today announced that the Board of Chosen Freeholders have adopted a resolution opposing Governor Jon Corzine's state budget proposal to cut state aid at their regular meeting on March 19, 2008.

"Governor Corzine's goal to reduce the property tax burden on residents and eliminate the state debt is admirable but his proposed methods are too strong too soon," said Director Ware. "Salem County will be dramatically hit by these cuts since they target small towns which are what we have in our county. Our municipalities still have essential operating functions that will need to be funded. The Governor's proposal merely shifts the burden from the state to our already hard-pressed municipalities. We need true reform and this is not it."

Governor Corzine's proposal targets small municipalities with fewer than 10,000 people for aid reductions to encourage municipal mergers and service sharing. In his proposed budget, all municipal aid payments for towns smaller than 5,000 people would be eliminated and towns between 5,000 and 10,000 will lose half of their aid.

"Salem County and its municipalities are already embracing shared services as we are applying for grant funding to conduct feasibility studies for merging municipal courts, creating a county-wide police force, and now centralizing animal control," said Deputy Director Lindenmuth, who has spearheaded the county's efforts for shared services. "The Governor is right in that we must consolidate services, but these dramatic cuts are a cold-turkey solution to a complicated problem. We have to make sure that the consolidation efforts are grounded in common-sense principles in that they maintain or improve services and cut costs. In order to properly enact shared services for the tax payer, it takes time."

The resolution adopted by the Freeholders states, "mayors have warned that such cuts would inevitably lead to fewer services or property tax hikes" and, "aid cuts should be phased in so towns have time to implement new savings."

"This country is going through tough financial times and Salem County is no exception," said Freeholder Bruce Bobbitt. "Our residents are facing rising costs for everything from gas to produce and it is already tough for them to put food on the table. The Governor's proposal will pass the buck from the state budget to the municipal budget which would not result in any immediate savings. Additionally, it unfairly targets smaller towns with



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the largest cuts, which means it hits the heart of our County. We need true property tax reform and this is not it."